

## **Slovakia**

### **Facts and Statistics**

**Location:** Central Europe, south of Poland and sharing borders with Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine

**Capital:** Bratislava

**Climate:** temperate; cool summers; cold, cloudy, humid winters

**Population:** 5,447,502 (July 2007 est.)

**Ethnic Make-up:** Slovak 85.8%, Hungarian 9.7%, Roma 1.7%, Ruthenian/Ukrainian 1%, other and unspecified 1.8% (2001 census)

**Religions:** Roman Catholic 68.9%, Protestant 10.8%, Greek Catholic 4.1%, other or unspecified 3.2%, none 13% (2001 census)

**Government:** parliamentary democracy

### **Language in Slovakia**

The Slovak language, sometimes referred to as "Slovakian", is an Indo-European language belonging to the West Slavic languages (together with Czech, Polish, Kashubian and Sorbian). Slovak is mutually intelligible with Czech.

Slovak, as a written language, did not exist until the end of the 18th Century, when Anton Bernolak, a Roman Catholic priest set about to create a Slovak literary language. He based his creation on the Western Slovakian dialect and produced a phonetic spelling (one that is written as it is pronounced).

Bernolak published his new language in his "Grammatica Slavica" in 1790. The language was further developed in 1843, when an agreement on the codification of Slovak as a written language was made. This was led by Ludovit Stur, who now chose the Central dialect as the basis, believing it to be the purest form.

### **Slovak People, Society and Culture**

#### **The People**

The people of Slovakia descend from the Slavic peoples who settled around the Danube river basin in the 6th and 7th centuries. Traditionally, Slovaks were what could be termed the "peasant class." Their links to the earth and land still remain to this day. Under communism some industrialization was undertaken and today Slovak society includes both elements of folk traditions and modern society. The political transformations of 1989 brought new freedoms that have considerably widened the societal outlook of the populace, yet many of the cultural movements are still in their infancy and consequently a large part of the elderly population is still rural and dependant on agriculture.

On January 1, 1993 Slovakia became an independent nation-state, recognized by the United Nations and its member states. Although some aspects of the society already had a unique national character, namely the language, many of the customs, laws and conventions were still deeply influenced by past rulers: Czechs, Hungarians and the Austrian Habsburgs.

#### **The Family**

The family is the centre of the social structure. It, together with close friends, forms the basis of financial and emotional support. Obligation to the family is a person's number one priority.

#### **A Spa Culture**

Slovakia has a large number of natural curative springs as well as extensive deposits of high-quality healing peat and mud. Throughout the ages people have taken advantage of these resources to cure a variety of diseases and ailments. The country has more than 1,160 registered mineral and thermal springs. Even

Marcus Aurelius' Roman legions tried out the thermal water, and several of the better-known spas are visited every year by people from many countries.

### **A Private People**

Slovaks value their privacy. It takes a while for them to open up to and trust new people. As a result they can seem overly formal and reserved. They are not exuberant and are not given to emotional displays. Once you develop a personal relationship Slovaks will start to open up. Although always polite, they seldom move to a first-name basis with people outside their extended family or very close friends.